

Silver changes, the cents' worth and gold mettle

By Roger Boye

This week's column answers more questions about coins and medals.

Q—Which Canadian coins still have silver? We saved \$11 worth of change—most in dimes and quarters—from our July vacation in Montreal.

R.E., Decatur

A—Sorry, but Canada eliminated silver from its circulating coinage on Aug. 1, 1968. Modern-day Canadian dimes and quarters contain pure nickel; the older silver specimens have long since disappeared from circulation.

Q—I want to sell my 250 "wheat cents" for a fair price. Most have dates in the 1940s and 1950s, and are worn from use. What might I expect to get in today's market?

A.C., Cicero

A—Some dealers are paying from 1.5 to 1.7 cents each for circulated "common dates," according to advertisements in hobby publications. Wheat cents with "S" mint marks usually fetch slightly more.

Be sure to check the years before you sell. Uncle Sam issued "wheaties" [Lincolns depicting two ears of wheat on the tails side] from 1909 to 1958; most of them minted before 1940 are worth more than those of later vintage. [The Lincoln Memorial design was added in 1959 to commemorate the 150th anniversary of Lincoln's birth.]

Q—We paid \$29.95 for a small medal described as "coated with 12-karat gold." How can anyone afford to sell a gold medal so cheaply?

P.W., Chicago

A—Most likely, your medal contains less than \$1 worth of gold because the plating is extremely thin, about one-thousandth of an inch thick. The medal's core probably is a cheap copper-nickel alloy. Also, the producer saved money by plating with 12-karat gold, which is 50 percent pure.

Q—I've seen references to "matte proof" coins and "matte-like proof." What's the difference between that and a simple "proof"?

S.O., Davenport, Iowa

A—Early this century, Uncle Sam issued "matte proofs" [specially prepared coins made for sale to collectors] that had a granular surface created by dipping each piece in acid. In 1936, officials changed the production process, resulting in proofs with the brilliant, mirrorlike surfaces that are seen on modern-day specimens.